

**A PERSONAL
VERSES-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY**

LAMENTATIONS

**By
Sharon Cravens**

Clarke: "Although the Lamentations do not bear any name of an author they have been ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah in the oldest tradition already. The Lamentations in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT, around 200 BC) begin with the following words: 'And it happened after Israel had been led captive and Jerusalem had been destroyed that Jeremiah sat and lamented with the following lamentation and said: How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!'"

Ironsides: "Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in the year 586 BC, which is described in the Lamentations by Jeremiah as eyewitness, is decisive for the date of writing. The time of writing therefore will have to be set shortly after this incident and in Jeremiah's last years of life."

Chuck Smith: "There is on the site of Golgotha a cave that is called Jeremiah's Grotto. This cave known as Jeremiah's Grotto comprises a part of the face of the skull; hence the name Golgotha. Because as you look at the cliff, with these caves that are there in the cliff, they take the appearance of a skull. One of these caves is called Jeremiah's Grotto. It is interesting that from those caves there on the site of Golgotha, you have a tremendous view of the city of Jerusalem, for Golgotha is actually the top of what was once Mount Moriah. And it looks down over the city of Jerusalem. Tradition declares that Jeremiah sat in this grotto when he wrote the book of Lamentations, and there he wept and cried over the desolation of the city of Jerusalem as he saw its ruins, as he saw the walls destroyed, as he saw the buildings leveled. And from this vantage, he wrote this book."

Guzik: "The Book of Lamentations is the collection of five poems or songs mourning the conquest of Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Judah....Lamentations is a remarkable written work because the first four of the five poems are written as acrostics. The twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used in succession to begin the lines and sections of those songs."

Lamentations 1:1 ¶ How doth the city sit solitary, *that was full of people!* *how* is she become as a widow! she *that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how* is she become tributary!

Lamentations 1:2 She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears *are* on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort *her*: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies.

Lamentations 1:3 Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits.

As you continue to read the chapter, Jerusalem is specifically identified as the city in mourning. Jeremiah compares the once bustling city to a widow—solitary, helpless and alone. The third and last group of people had been taken into captivity. Though not identified in the book, history identifies Babylon as the place to which they were taken captive. Jerusalem had once been recognized as a princess in their region of the earth, especially during the reign of Solomon.

Historical note from JFB: “The coin struck on the taking of Jerusalem by Titus, representing Judea as a female sitting solitary under a palm tree, with the inscription, *Judaea Capta*, singularly corresponds to the image here....”

The city is compared to a woman that is weeping because she has been deserted by her lovers. She doesn't have a friend left in the world. Those who had called themselves her friend had betrayed her and become her enemies.

The people of Judah had been taken into captivity because they had abased and defiled themselves (from the Hebrew root for “afflicted”). They now lived among the very people that had betrayed them, the Gentiles. When they were captured, they had nowhere to run for safety; everyone had turned against them.

Ironsides: “Failing to maintain the place of separation to which God had called her, mingling promiscuously among her heathen neighbours, she soon proved, as all do who follow her steps, that ‘evil communications corrupt good manners.’ Walking with idolaters, she learned their ways; and as a result God gave her up to wander among the nations until she sickened of their practices.”

Lamentations 1:4 The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.

Lamentations 1:5 Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy.

Lamentations 1:6 And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts *that* find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer.

The ways or paths to Zion are said to be mourning because they are empty; no one is traveling them to get to the solemn feasts at the temple. The gates of the city had been destroyed, along with the rest of the city. The few priests and unmarried girls that remained all grieved in bitterness.

The enemies of Jerusalem were secure and safe, while the people of Jerusalem had been taken captive. Why? Because the LORD was judging them for their many, many sins. Jerusalem has lost all her beauty and her princes / rulers had been rendered weak and useless. This had been foretold by Moses.

Deuteronomy 28:15, 41 & 45 "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee....Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity....Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee...."

To Jeremiah's anguish, he had personally tried to warn the people over and over again of the consequences of continuing to rebel against the LORD. For example:

Jeremiah 25:4-9 "And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof...."

Lamentations 1:7 Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths.

Lamentations 1:8 Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward.

Jeremiah personifies Jerusalem, speaking of how, in the midst of her affliction, she remembered glorious days of old. When the day came that her people were taken captive by the enemy, there was no one to help her; her enemies mocked her.

The people of Jerusalem had sinned greatly and were being judged. She was no longer a city of any reputation. She was destroyed. She was now despised by those that had once honored her. Jeremiah pictures her stripped and humiliated before her enemies, turning her face away in shame.

Lamentations 1:9 Her filthiness is in her skirts; she remembereth not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully: she had no comforter. O LORD, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified *himself*.

Lamentations 1:10 The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen *that* the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command *that* they should not enter into thy congregation.

By describing her filthiness as in her skirts, Jeremiah is picturing her as a prostitute. Turning away from the one true God to follow false gods is pictured as adultery in the scripture, so the comparison is appropriate. She embraced her sin with no regard for the future consequences. Even though the scripture foretold it and God sent the prophets to warn and urge them to turn from their sin, they chose not to believe—I believe, in large part, because of God’s long-suffering. The same is true today as we await the return of Jesus.

2 Peter 3:3-4 & 9 “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation....The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

The fall of Jerusalem was hard; there was no one to comfort her. She is pictured calling out to the LORD in anguish because of how the enemy boasted in triumph over her. The enemy had broken her apart and defiled the temple; they had entered where God had forbidden them to go.

Lamentations 1:11 All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile.

The prophet notes how those left in the city are poor and searching for food. They are selling what few treasures they have left just to get food to eat. Some commentators think this is a reference to selling their children. She is pictured calling out for the LORD to consider how despicable she has become—obviously hoping for His pity.

Lamentations 1:12 ¶ *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.*

Jerusalem is pictured calling out to those that would pass by her to look and see if they had seen anything that compared to the sorrow she endured as a result of the LORD's anger against her.

Guzik: "Jerusalem felt what many sufferers feel; that her **sorrow** was incomparable to others and incomprehensible to others. There is a sense in which this is true, but it is true for everyone who endures a deep season of suffering. Few if any can truly relate to the depths of their **sorrow**."

Lamentations 1:13 From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaieth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate *and* faint all the day.

Lamentations 1:14 The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, *and* come up upon my neck: he hath made my strength to fall, the Lord hath delivered me into *their* hands, *from whom* I am not able to rise up.

Lamentations 1:15 The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty *men* in the midst of me: he hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men: the Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, *as* in a winepress.

Jeremiah is using poetic language to describe God's judgment coming down upon Jerusalem and its people as a fire and as a trap, leaving them sick and weak. He pictures their captivity as being under a yoke held firmly in place by the LORD; a yoke made strong by their many sins. They have no strength and no hope of escape because it is the LORD that has delivered them into the hands of their captor. The mighty men of Judah are pictured being trampled under God's feet and the city of Jerusalem (from the Hebrew for "virgin") as his winepress.

Lamentations 1:16 For these *things* I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed.

Lamentations 1:17 Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her: the LORD hath commanded concerning Jacob, that his adversaries should be round about him: Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them.

I like the clear wording of the NIV for these verses: *“This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed. Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her. The LORD has decreed for Jacob that his neighbors become his foes; Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them.”*

Lamentations 1:18 The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.

Lamentations 1:19 I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls.

Still personified, Jerusalem admits that the LORD is righteous. Her people had rebelled against His commandments and deserved His judgment—being taken captive to Babylon. She admits that those she had loved in rejection of the LORD had deceived her. As is true with all adulterous partners, they didn’t really love her; they used her. It seems that many of her priests and city leaders died of starvation during the siege.

Chuck Smith: “The Lord is always righteous in judgment, and yet it seems that that is an area where we always want to fault God. And we always hear sort of insinuations that God is unrighteous in judgment. ‘How can a God of love condemn a man to hell?’ You know, and you’ve heard the rest of it. And the idea is that God is not really righteous when He judges. But that’s one thing you can be certain of, and that is the righteousness of God in judgment.”

Lamentations 1:20 Behold, O LORD; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death.

Lamentations 1:21 They have heard that I sigh: there is none to comfort me: all mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that thou hast done it: thou wilt bring the day that thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me.

Lamentations 1:22 Let all their wickedness come before thee; and do unto them, as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions: for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint.

The city calls out in distress to the LORD. She is suffering both inside and out. She is grieving over her sin as well as over the death of her people. Again, the point is made that there is no comfort to be found. Her enemies are rejoicing over the fact that God had judged His people. She calls out for the LORD to judge them just as surely as He had judged her. Yes, she had greatly sinned; but so had they.

The chapter closes with Jerusalem declaring that she suffers most from sickness of heart.